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LETTERS OF JOHN PRESTON.¹

TO FRANCIS PRESTON. DESCRIBING DUEL BETWEEN GEN. WOOD
AND THOS. MADISON.

. . . I will join in an attempt to procure him pay during his captivity, so that I think he had better be sent to this place as soon as possible that he may be here before the rising of the Assembly which I expect will be short; as nothing of importance is likely to come before us this Session.

Stephen T Mason & Henry Tazwell are our Senators—Robert Brooke our Governor.

A few mornings ago some misunderstanding took place between Genl Wood & Mr. Thos Madison,² about the election of the Governor, in which tho not face to face some things were said which they supposed involved their public & private characters A Challenge passed, was accepted & they met at the Church yard, & fired at each other once, but missed; a second load was put into the pistols, when the seconds (Colo Steel & myself) interposed & compromised the difference amicable & honorably;—It was a misunderstanding of terms & not of sentiments & the too officious conduct of their pretended friends that created the difference—They both behaved bravely & stood very firm.

Ive not heard from home lately I'm in good health, so is the rest of our relations in this quarter—

I am Dr Brother yours most affectionately

J Preston

Nov. 25, 1794

¹For other letters of John Preston see the *William and Mary College Quarterly*, new series, Jan., 1921, v. 1, no. 1.

²Mrs. Madison was a sister of Patrick Henry, and an aunt of Mrs. Francis Preston.

TO FRANCIS PRESTON. INTERESTING DISCUSSION OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

Jo. Breckenridges Lexington May 3, '93

Dear Francis

After a very tedious tho' (after I left Kanawa) not a very disagreeable journey, I arrived at this place the 28th Int; having parted with Billy two days before at Limestone on the Ohio, who went on to head quarters with his company all in good health & Spirits. I should have accompanied them but heard of Genl Wilkenson whom we met on the River that B. Smith has been just sent on command to one of the frontier posts; this journey I then put off untill I can hear of his return; I'm happy to say that from Genl. Wilkenson's information B. Smith who is now promoted to a Major has intirely reformed; become a new man both in his conduct & constitution, & abandoned both women & wine *forever*, as his greatest enemies & the only cause of his former disgrace; God grant he may persever in this judicious & prudent resolution; in which if he succeeds his friends may again have some hopes of him. I have collected very little news since I came to this state; the Indians have done no mischief for some time past; it is supposed the treaty which is on the Carpet has put an end to this for a time. What will be the result of it no one can tell, but it is generally supposed, the Indians will not treat upon any terms which will be acceptable to us;—it is however wished for in this country, that their terms may be refused and the war against them continued. I think in all probability there will be no campaign carried on against them this season should the treaty fail as Genl. Wayne has orders to act only on the defensive untill the result of the treaty can be known; the treaty commences about the 10th of June somewhere near the lakes (under British protection) some time must be necessarily spent in conferences, etc, which .will nearly spend the month of June; the report of the Commissioners to the President & the time he will take to consider & adopt other plans, will exhaust July; & then to give Genl Wayne official notice of this & he to put some necessary measures on foot will bring about the first of Sept. a

period too late in the year to call on the militia for aid, who cannot return in the winter seasons; & his own army is too small to proceed without this assistance; I've heard it amounts only to 2500 effective men. The business of this treaty & the effect that it may have is highly disagreeable to the people of this country. The setting it on foot is contributed to the President of the United States, for which he is spoken of freely here; indeed much more so than I ever heard before at any time or place. Some few politicians in this country talk of a disunion with the U States; of an intire independent government; of an alliance with G Britain etc God only knows what event a few years may bring about.

I have done but little business since my arrival only enquired the price of Land, I proposed some for sale, & yours at the falls. The seat of Government seems to influence the price of Land in this country more than any other circumstance; Lands situated near it bear a very high price, from $21\frac{1}{2}$ to 10 Dollars an acre according to its conveniences. I've seen Genl Breckenridge, & told him that you wished to sell, he appeared desirous to purchase; no proposals were made or terms offered, tho' I thought I collected enough to discover that his price would not be sufficient; Two or three more have spoken to me about it; Lands are rising & I think it would be improper for you to sell if a good price cannot now be had provided you can in any manner make out without it. The fit for purchasing land near the seat of Government where every persons attention is now turn'd will shortly cease. & then lands distant from it will again begin to be in better repute. Pray write me every opportunity. Your friends are all in good health & circumstances in this County. John Breckenridge will make a fortune hastily, he is in high repute;

My love to your wife etc, Adieu

J. Preston

TO FRANCIS PRESTON. DISCUSSES POLITICS OF TIME.

At Smithfield Decr. 19th, 1802.

Dr Brother

It would have given me much pleasure to have seen you when you was at Wythe Court-house last week & had I not been confined with a fit of the Rheumatic would have went up:—

It has been a matter of much conversation among the Republicans throughout the Counties I have travelled in the last two months past respecting a change of the Congressional district of Botetourt etc- They conceive (— I believe with propriety too) that unless the contemplated change is made, a Federal candidate may or will be elected, which will give courage again in this quarter of Virginia to that party. I know every exertion on the part of the Federalist will be made, but not openly until a short time before the election; The private system of attack is now visible. Every kind of artifice is used, ridicule, contempt, & treating in the lightest manner the present mode of administering the Government, as trifling & puerile, & unworthy of so great a nation as we are; This is to prepare the way for introducing a man who will assist in conducting the Government with more dignity, that is like the former administration conducted it etc—with a thousand other little modes which may have some weight with people who have not fairly decided on the late important question respecting principle—in this state a very large majority of the People of Greenbriar, Monroe & Kanawa are & they would be as apt to decide in favour of a Federal as a Republican Candidate— The Republicans of Virginia wish ardently that there should not be the least division in sentiment among their Representatives in the next Congress & and without this & one or two more changes in the districts laid off last session of the Assembly there is great danger of this division. I have been frequently consulted on the occasion, but I confess never strongly encouraged the thing, for two reasons. One that I feared that if Montgomery should be added to Botetourt that a man might be elected in your district who would be more to be feared than an open professed honest Federalist; I thought two men would be candidates, neither of whom can in my opinion be trusted & the one or the other of them would be chosen if no better offered. The other reason is that I feared I might be suspected, for wishing a district that might suit myself to the prejudice of the present Representative; as by adding Montgomery to the lower counties, & Kanawa to Wythe, it would place me in a district in which I was infinitely better known than Col. Trigg, & would cut off from him almost all his acquaintances—this latter objection

I could get over by positively declining to offer in case Col. Trigg did, but the former I could not without you would agree to be a Candidate for the upper district, & I believe sincerely if you would, that the district would be changed:— I gave my opinion to all who spoke with me on the subject freely respecting the two persons whom I reckoned would be candidates in your district; it was almost always accorded to & the same opinion seemed to have possessed nearly all I spoke with on the subject, & all mentioned you. Now I think if you will agree to offer that the change ought to be made & can be done if it is known in time that you will offer— Would you say whether or not you will? Our Cousin Frank Smith I have learnt wishes to be a Candidate in case the alteration is made; I sincerely wish to see him advanced in life as much as is proper, but I doubt whether it would be right in him (suppose he could be elected) to turn himself into that route for a time to come— I heard he had consulted you & that you approved of his plan. I would be glad to hear upon what ground you did it.

Brother William informs me that you complained of a scarcity of hands to carry on your iron works & would be willing perhaps to hire some; Should this be the case and we can agree I would hire seven of my best negroe men to you for a year & also the waggon and team you had last summer; The horses are in good order again & every thing about the gears will be well repaired. The men that I would hire are, Billy Pointer, Will Braxton, Butcher Ned, Henry, Daniel Farrow, Hanibal, & Tom—with the last mentioned, China must be hired, as she is his wife, the others have not wives. Should you feel any disposition to hire these men & the woman, & waggon & team you will please to let me hear from you by the return of the next post, as I have another plan in view to dispose of them if this does not succeed in a few days.

I am happy to hear that your Lady is in better health & pray she may continue to get better untill she is perfectly recovered. My little ones are in great health. Polly & myself have both been unwell she with the mumps, I with the Rheumatism, we have however so far recruited as to venture out this far. Our Mother

is well, Mrs. A. Preston also, & that is the family who are at this place at present:—

With love I am Dr. Brother

Yours sincerely

J Preston

P. S. Our Mother begs

you would send her 4 or 8 bushels of

salt in a barrel or two by Mr. John Preston's wagon when it comes down, or by some other opportunity.

J Preston.

TO FRANCIS PRESTON. DISCUSSES POLITICAL CONDITIONS.

Richmond Mar. 3rd. 1813.

Dr Brother

Nothing material has occurred since you left this, nor have had any news of consequence from the Blockading Squadron since you left us. It is said that several of the vessels have disappeared and two only remain in Lynhaven Bay; if these have really gone off we shall shortly have a scuffle with those remaining. The Constellation, the 26 Gun Boats near Norfolk, together with such force as could & ought to be sent down the Patomack, making a *simultaneous*, & combined movement under a favourable wind might make a successful attack on any two frigates of the Blockading Squadron. But my opinion is that all the Vessels that have disappeared are out, gone out on a cruise, or to look into some of our other seaports, & harbours to give alarms. This is the kind of war we shall be subjected to, & more indeed for whenever a favourable opportunity offers & we are found off our guard the enemy will make a landing, & destroy & plunder some one or more of our towns.— You will see in the papers the infamous attempt of the British Government to seduce out Citizens from their allegiance, & to produce discord & a separation between us, in the infernal orders to their Governors etc—& the proclamation of the Prince

Regent. I really fear that the cupidity of the merchants will be ready to seize on such an offer & thereby create great disturbances among our citizens. I wish Congress would lay an Embargo & make it felony to violate it.

Enclose you have the Auditors Quietus to Lewis Toncray, Jailor of Washington for \$389.25 the nett proceeds of the sale of a run away slave called Mingo, which sum I advanced for you agreeable to your request.—

We are all well & wish you may find your dear family in . . . state to whom we all desire to be affectionately remembered.

Yr Brother

J Preston